PITTA

Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 18 Number 7 July 2021

DECCAN BIRDERS EVENTS

In light of the Corona virus (COVID-19) epidemic and relevant guidelines that have been issued, all Deccan Birders Field Trips and Indoor Meetings are on hold until further notice. Details of upcoming activities will be communicated once the situation improves.

WEEKEND BIRDING

Trip Report: Bettakote Kere & Singanayakanahalli Kere, Bengaluru, July 10 & 11, 2021

Text & Photos: Arthit (age 11)

A view of Bettakote Lake

I woke up at 5:30AM, packed everything I needed and left for birding with my father. We live not very far from Lake Bettakote, so we arrived in just half an hour. There were a few other people there. It was drizzling when we arrived, and I took shelter under my father's umbrella. A sudden gust of wind turned the umbrella upside down, but luckily it had stopped raining by then. We waited for a few other people. By 7:00AM everyone had arrived and we were ready.

We went across a field of palm trees, watching the habitat for birds. We spotted a Rose-ringed Parakeet. When we arrived at a great field near the lake, we saw many Lesser Whistling-ducks on the surface of the water. There was an airport just ahead. Everyone tried to click photos of the Whistling-ducks. I, being a beginner, had a beginner's camera with less zooming power, and the birds were a little distant.

We walked across the great plain, exploring the area. While doing so, I saw a Common Tiger butterfly. Suddenly someone spotted a Cotton Pygmy-goose. Once my father spotted the Goose, he told me where to look. The water was camouflaging the bird well and we all had a hard time spotting it. I finally found it after a lot of effort.

Great Cormorant

After this we took some more pictures of Egrets and Whistling-ducks. There were many aeroplanes departing and arriving from time to time. Once a plane flew really close to us, so I decided to take a picture of it.

Common Kingfisher

We saw an Egret, which turned out to be an Intermediate Egret. I never knew there also was an 'Intermediate'. By now it was time for me to go back home, as I had a class, and so I did.

That night, as I went to sleep, I grew more and more impatient for the coming day.

Singanayakanahalli Lake

Again the next morning, I woke up at 5:30AM. This day was much more fresh, and I was glad. This time we were the first to arrive at Singanayakanahalli Lake. Just about 7 minutes later, 2 more people came, and then another. We began to walk across the huge sloped plain. Unlike the previous lake, this one was almost fully dry. There were only small ponds in certain areas, but the lake was actually humongous. We immediately saw a Brahminy Kite, perched on top of a pole. We got quite close to it, but maintained a distance.

We then walked across a part of the dry lake bed to find a small region filled with water. In the middle there was a big net, and a Grey Heron was standing right on it. We took multiple shots of it. In the net, we saw the corpse of another poor Grey Heron hanging, and we were all very sad.

Grey Heron

Plantation on lake bed

We then walked into the distant hilly areas. We saw many Paddyfield Pipits, Baya Weavers, some Red-rumped and Streak-throated Swallows, etc – and kept seeing them throughout the morning. Then we arrived at a dense forest. It looked very beautiful as the trees had no spacing in between, and were very wide and short. The lower part of the trees was light pink.

Plain Prinia

We went inside the forest. On almost every tree, there were small toadstools growing. The big toadstools were growing on the ground and some people took photos of them. We also saw many spiders. In the end we saw a Common Indian Tree Frog, and everyone took photos of this too.

By now we were thinking of returning home. Before we did so, we decided to check out a nest-filled tree. We climbed up to a higher region, went a bit closer and saw many birds near that tree. Now our desire was complete and we took leave. It was quite an interesting weekend and I also learned some new bird names. They are – Paddyfield Pipit, Streak-throated Swallow and Common Indian Tree Frog.

Black Kite juvenile

Footprint of unidentified bird

The full list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Bettakote Kere July 10, 2021	Singanayakanahalli (Nagadasanahalli) Kere July 11, 2021
1	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	Y	Y
2	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptis ruficollis*	Y	
3	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*		Y
4	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*		Y
5	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	*Columba livia*		Y
6	Spotted Dove	*Stigmatopelia chinensis*	Y	Y
7	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	Y	Y
8	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	Y	Y
9	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	Y	Y
10	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*		Y
11	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*		Y
12	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	Y	
13	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio porphyrio*	Y	
14	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	Y	Y
15	Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*		Y
16	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	Y	
17	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	Y	
18	Little Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*	Y	Y
19	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*		Y
20	Yellow Bittern	*Ixobrychus sinensis*	Y	
21	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	Y	Y
22	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	Y	Y
23	Great Egret	*Casmerodius albus*	Y	Y
24	Intermediate Egret	*Mesophoyx intermedia*	Y	
25	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	Y	Y
26	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*		Y
27	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*		Y
28	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*		Y
29	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	Y	
30	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	Y	
31	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	Y	Y
32	Brahminy Kite	*Haliastur indus*	Y	Y
33	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*		Y
34	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	Y	Y
35	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	Y	Y

Sl No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Bettakote Kere July 10, 2021	Singanayakanahalli (Nagadasanahalli) Kere July 11, 2021
36	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*	Y	
37	Red-necked Falcon	*Falco chicquera*	Y	
38	Alexandrine Parakeet	*Psittacula eupatria*		Y
39	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*	Y	Y
40	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*		Y
41	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	Y	Y
42	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*	Y	Y
43	Jerdon's Bushlark	*Mirafra affinis*	Y	Y
44	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	Y	Y
45	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	Y	
46	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*		Y
47	Clamorous Reed Warbler (call)	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*	Y	
48	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*	Y	Y
49	Streak-throated Swallow	*Petrochelidon fluvicola*		Y
50	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*	Y	Y
51	Red-whiskered Bulbul	*Pycnonotus jocosus*		Y
52	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*	Y	
53	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*	Y	Y
54	Jungle Myna	*Acridotheres fuscus*	Y	Y
55	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*		Y
56	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*		Y
57	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*		Y
58	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*		Y
59	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*		Y
60	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*		Y
61	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*	Y	Y
62	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*		Y
63	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*		Y
64	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*		Y
65	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*	Y	Y
66	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	Y	

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Bird Humour

Umesh Mani

(Received on Whatsapp, June 19, 2021)

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BIRDS, BUTTERFLIES & AN INSTITUTE

Report: National Institute of Tourism & Hospitality Management (NITHM), Hyderabad, July 3, 2021

Surekha Aitabathula

Some views of NITHM (Stock photos courtesy: Yadagiri, NITHM)

Corona Virus – first wave, then second wave and multiple lockdowns. All these had brought birding to a halt for Deccan Birders. In this scenario a call from Sri Chinnam Reddy, Director, National Institute of Tourism & Hospitality Management (NITHM), inviting Deccan Birders to do bird watching in their campus, was like manna from heaven. Due to the prevailing COVID conditions, and also since we wanted to initially just do a recce to assess the scope for a future Deccan Birders' regular monthly field trip, we did not take a big group. Rather, only seven of us reached NITHM on 3rd July – a fine Saturday morning.

The group in action (Photo: Yadagiri, NITHM)

The 26-acre campus threw up 41 bird and 14 butterfly species. We spotted the first 25 species just about 100 metres into the main entrance gate. There was a small water body to the left of the entrance gate.

Indian Spot-billed Duck (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Common Coot (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

We saw Common Coots (*Fulica atra*) with fledglings, Indian Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) and a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*).

Checking out a well in the campus
(Photo: Yadagiri, NITHM)

Little Grebe (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Large Grey Babbler (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

A little ahead of the water body is the Administrative Block. Here we saw Large Grey Babbler (*Turdoides malcomi*), Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*), Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) and Pale-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*).

Pale-billed Flowerpecker
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Scaly-breasted Munia (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Also present were Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), Indian Silverbill (*Euodice malabarica*) and Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*). A Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) gave a beautiful glimpse of itself when it flew out of and back into the vegetation in a sweeping arc.

Green Bee-eater (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Purple-rumped Sunbird (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Stinking Dapperling (*Lepiota cristata*)
(Photo: Surekha Aitabathula)

Chinese Hibiscus aka China Rose (*Hibiscus rosasinensis*) (Photo: Surekha Aitabathula)

There were several interesting sites on the campus, such as the Sculpture Park and the Miyawaki Forest. The stepped pathway around the campus went up and down giving us some mild exercise of sorts. The campus was quiet and peaceful, a nice green lung in the middle of the hustle bustle of Gachibowli with lots of coconut trees lining it. We heard the harsh and grunting calls of Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and the melodious Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) and the Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*) as though in a welcome chorus.

Common Iora (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Plain Tiger (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Purple Allamanda (*Allamanda blanchetti*) (Photo: Surekha Aitabathula)

One by one, the butterflies came out to dry their cool night-soaked wings in the sun. These colourful and delicate creatures delighted us no end. We saw lots of Small Grass Yellows (*Eurema brigitta*) and Common Grass Yellows (*Eurema hecabe*), magnificent little bursts of bright yellow flitting from plant to plant, never seeming to rest.

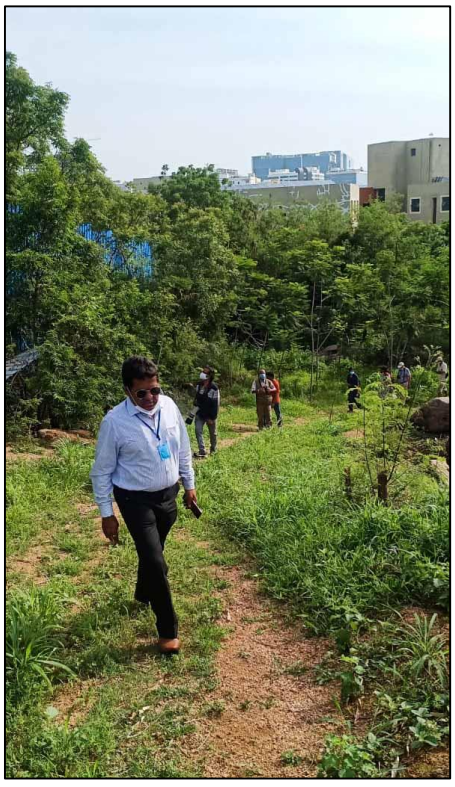
Common Grass Yellow (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Pioneer (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

We spotted several Pioneers (*Belenois aurota*) and Common Leopards (*Phalanta phalantha*). Psyche (*Leptosia nina*) was a happy sighting. So rapt was I in watching the butterflies that I fell down after catching my foot in a creeper bed. This fall offered some comic relief to my fellow birders!

Common Leopard (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Purple Sunbird in eclipse plumage
(Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)



Mr Chinnam Reddy leading the walk
(Photo: Yadagiri, NITHM)

NITHM was established in 2004. As Director Mr Chinnam Reddy and the Principal walked along with us, they informed us that NITHM offers BBA and MBA in Tourism and Hospitality and also BSc in Hospitality and Hotel Administration. A substantial number of foreign students from Africa and Southeast Asia come to study in NITHM. The Institute has hostel accommodation on campus and a cricket ground, an upcoming walking path and a five star hotel which would be up and about by December 2021.

We were taken on a tour of the Institute's training kitchens. There was a Bar & Restaurant used solely for the purpose of training. No consumption here! The posters in the restaurant were very interesting. The posters taught the students a lot of what there is to know about serving.

Some posters at the training kitchen
(Photo: Surekha Aitabathula)

We do not realise when we go to a restaurant that a lot goes into the process of serving food and drinks. There is actually a method in glassware, flatware, steward's toolkit and napkin folds. I was happy to learn something new. When we sat down to the fabulous breakfast arranged for us by the Director, we laughed about how birding early in the morning, always revs up our appetite for breakfast.

As we drove back I thought there are umpteen educational institutions in Telangana. If only each institution would strive to create some substantial green space within its campus, everyone could experience how good it feels to take in lungfuls of oxygen.

The full list of sightings during the outing is given below:

List of Birds					
S. No.	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**	**S. No.**	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	22	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
2	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	23	Coppersmith Barbet	*Xantholaema haemacephala*
3	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus coromandus*	24	Streak-throated Swallow	*Petrochelidon fluvicola*
4	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	25	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
5	Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	26	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
6	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	27	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*
7	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	28	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
8	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	29	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*
9	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	30	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
10	Common (aka Indian) Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	31	Large Grey Babbler	*Turdoides malcomi*
11	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	32	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
12	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	33	Grey-breasted Prinia	*Prinia hodgsonii*
13	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	34	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
14	Blue Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	35	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
15	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	36	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
16	Spotted Dove	*Spilopelia chinensis*	37	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
17	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	*Cacomantis passerines*	38	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
18	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys Scolopaceus*	39	Black Drongo	*Edolius macrocercus*
19	Southern Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	40	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
20	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	41	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
21	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*			

List of Butterflies					
S. No.	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**	**S. No.**	**Common Name**	**Scientific Name**
1	Glassy Tiger	*Parantica aglea*	8	Common Emigrant	*Catopsilia pomona*
2	Common Crow	*Euploea core*	9	Yellow Orange Tip	*Ixias pyrene*
3	Common Jezebel	*Delias euchari*	10	Plain Tiger	*Danaus chrysippus*
4	Common Rose	*Pachliopta aristolochiae*	11	Tawny Coster	*Acraea terpsicore*
5	Common Grass Yellow	*Eurema hecabe*	12	Pioneer	*Belenois aurota*
6	Small Grass Yellow	*Eurema brigitta*	13	Psyche	*Leptosia nina*
7	Common Castor	*Ariadne merione*	14	Common Leopard	*Phalanta phalantha*

Some other photos taken during the trip:

Common Jezebel (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Tiny Grass Blue (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Tawny Coster (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Red-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Grey-breasted Prinia (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Amarlily (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Rock Agama (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Grey-bellied Cuckoo (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Coppersmith Barbet (Photo: Shilka Chaudhari)

Amla tree (Photo: Surekha Aitabathula)

Pomegranate (Photo: Surekha Aitabathula)

The team during the walk (Photos: Yadagiri, NITHM)

Common Moorhen (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

Laughing Dove (Photo: Dr G Samuel Sukumar)

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MY BIRDING DIARY - A glimpse of Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary
Trip Report: Bharatpur, December 2016

Text & Photos: Dr Jayati Mitra

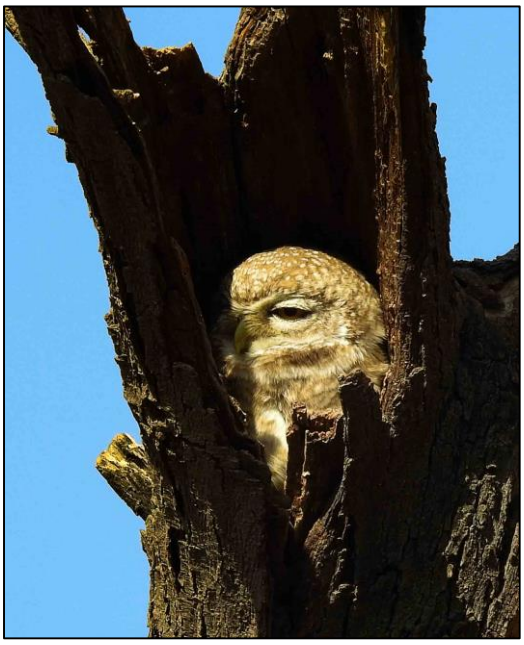
Eurasian Marsh Harrier

I was chugging along in a train in Rajasthan in the month of December 2016. I had just completed my work and it was time to return home but an idea held me back. I checked the route of the train and found that it passed through a station called Bharatpur. Immediately the picture of the famous wildlife sanctuary flashed through my mind and I decided to halt there for a short duration and visit this place. I pressed my cheek against the window pane to catch a glimpse of the outside scenery but could only sense the tiny droplets of condensed mist becoming more and more magnified, obscuring my view. Therefore, I remained focussed on the display board to see the name of the approaching station. Finally I stepped down from the train and looked around the small dilapidated station. Just three days were left for the New Year to arrive, and the intense cold weather had already gripped this small town. I made my way towards the exit, which was shrouded in a thick layer of fog. A few rickshaws were available outside and I boarded one to reach my temporary abode.

Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary was born out of a natural depression present at the confluence of rivers Gambhir and Banganga in Bharatpur. The area attracted a lot of birds and, around 1726, Suraj Mull, the Maharaja of this princely state, took advantage of the situation by creating an embankment – the Ajan Bund – in the south-west of the city, for sustenance of the area. This man- made water body lay along the West Asian flyway and attracted many migratory species of birds to the lake. Thus it became a regular, favourite spot for the hunting of ducks. Even though it had been declared a sanctuary in 1952, the shooting of wild birds continued for another twenty years till it was legally banned in 1972.The place was declared a world heritage site in 1985. Today, it encompasses an area of around 29 sq km. The park, surrounded by a two metre wide boundary wall, has faced droughts several times and, on the other hand, is also prone to seasonal flooding. In recent years, the Goverdhan drain, originating in Haryana, supplies water to the lake before it empties itself into the Yamuna.

I had decided to stay in an area called Sarus Circle which was pretty close to the sanctuary. It was almost noon by now but the fog still had not lifted. I was tired and hungry after the journey and settled down for a while after enjoying a hearty meal. I waited patiently for the sun to come out and then walked down towards the main gate. It was almost 3:00PM. There were multiple options available to roam around inside the park – walking, bicycles, rickshaws and an electric vehicle. I purchased my ticket and opted to travel in a cycle rickshaw. The vehicles were labelled with conspicuous brass number plates and the owners waited patiently in a queue for their turn to arrive.

Once inside the gate we rode along a straight metalled road through the middle of the sanctuary. The road roughly divided it into two sections in the eastern and western directions. My rickshaw puller introduced himself and shared his knowledge of the birds of the park and about the training he had undergone to act as a guide. He also informed me that there was a leopard on the prowl in the sanctuary, and warning boards had been put at many places to caution visitors.

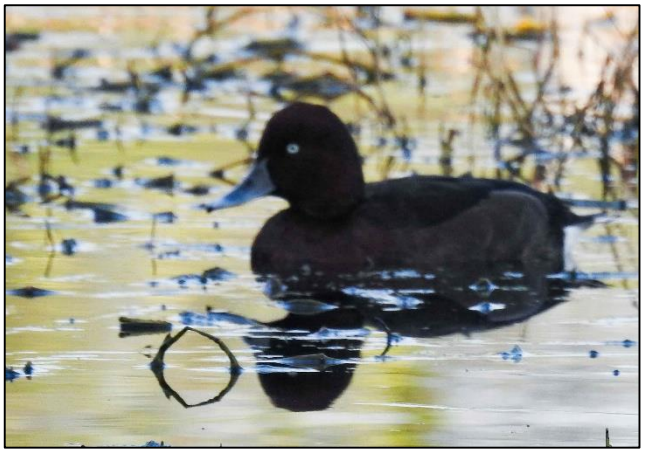


Spotted Owlet

We made our first halt at a very old dead tree stump where I sighted a Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) with half-closed eyes. I noticed the parched lowlands on both sides covered with dried grass, where about half a dozen Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) were feeding.

Grey Francolin

Further inside was the boating area, where I watched two raptors, a Eurasian Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) and a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) circling overhead. In the shrubs adjacent to the road, some sunbirds were hovering above the wildflowers in bloom. The vulture gradually rose higher in the sky and disappeared out of view.



Ferruginous Duck

Northern Pintail

Common Teal

We soon approached a densely wooded area with tall *jamun* trees lining both sides of the road, forming bowers. The dense foliage hardly allowed any light to filter through and it took a while for my eyes to get adjusted to the sudden darkness after coming from a brightly lit area. It was very damp and there were swamps on the eastern side. Here I observed a variety of water birds, namely – Indian Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*), Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) and Knob-billed Ducks (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*).

Spot-billed Duck & Knob-billed Duck

On the opposite side of the road a different picture emerged. The huge trees growing side by side around a swamp had quite a few passerine species. I found a highly energetic and restless Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*) diving frequently to the ground to catch insects, a Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*) waiting for its turn to feed, a Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*) and several Common Woodshrikes (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*).

Red-breasted Flycatcher

Common Woodshrike

Bluethroat

The light brown ones on the ground, moving among the rotten leaves, furtively searching for insects among the vegetation were the beautiful Bluethroats (*Luscinia svecica*). I saw four of them together and admired the dainty blue and orange-brown bands around their necks. Amidst all this action there was a Brown Fish Owl (*Bubo zeylonensis*) resting peacefully on top of a tree, face down in the canopy. It simply refused to turn around and I could only manage to observe the back plumage clearly.

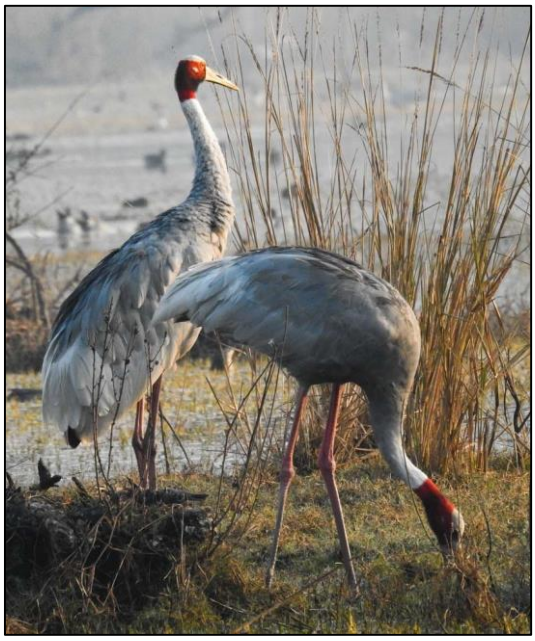
Suddenly my guide alerted me to a shrill call. They were the Sarus Cranes (*Grus antigone*) returning after feeding In the fields outside. We had to travel fast to catch a glimpse of the birds. We rushed forward in search of the cranes and reached a swamp called ‘Sapan Mori’. There was a path to the west and I had to trek along till the end and return to the rickshaw parked on the main road.

The journey started again, and I saw a huge number of Purple Swamphens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). There were swallows flying above the fields but no trace of the Sarus. The light started fading and I suddenly realised that there was no one else around me. I could see a faint apparition of a watch tower in the distance and was wondering what to do when a little bird came into my view. It was moving on the ground by my side and had a glossy black back and a reddish orange underbelly – a beautiful male Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*). It was not shy at all and hopped along by my side.

Black Redstart

Day two dawned slightly chilly and hazy. I had missed seeing the Sarus the previous evening and mentioned this to my new rickshaw puller-cum-guide. He took me straight to the densely wooded area and there was something interesting happening here. A flock of Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) were feeding along with some domestic animals that were allowed into the sanctuary to graze, and this seemed to be a regular affair.

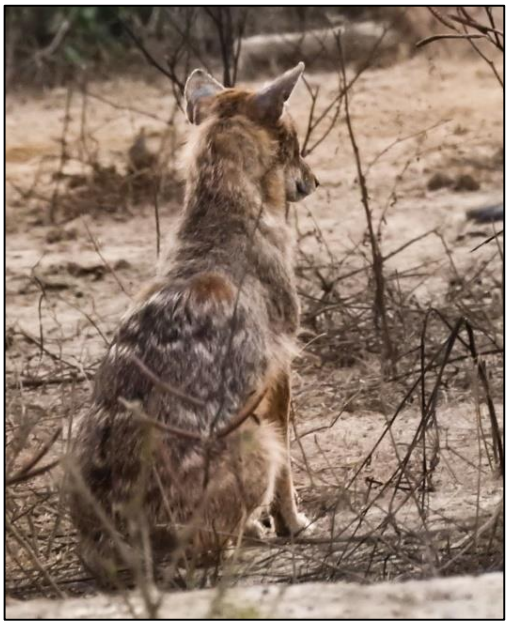
Bar-headed Goose



Sarus Crane

A little later my guide pointed towards the distant fields on the eastern side. Through the slight haze I clearly saw the Sarus Cranes! I watched the graceful movements of these heavy birds in the golden morning light. As they unfolded the wings and raised their necks upwards and downwards by twisting them symmetrically together it looked like a scene from a ballet show. There were three of them present at the spot and it was so satisfying to get a glimpse of them together.

I learnt that there were about six of them in the sanctuary and they left each day at dawn to feed in the distant fields, and returned only late in the evening. The other species of cranes, Common (*Grus grus*) and Demoiselle (*Grus virgo*) were irregular and had not yet arrived in this season at the site. The famous Siberian Crane, of course, had not come since 2002.



Golden Jackal

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon & Rose-ringed Parakeet

By this time, the sun had moved higher up in the sky and lit up the surroundings. I could see a few Yellow-footed Green Pigeons (*Treron phoenicoptera*) and Rose-ringed Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*) chattering on the topmost branches of the trees. Suddenly I spotted something different lying on a rock beside the road – a Monitor Lizard was basking in the sun, lying absolutely still while curious visitors looked on.

Monitor Lizard

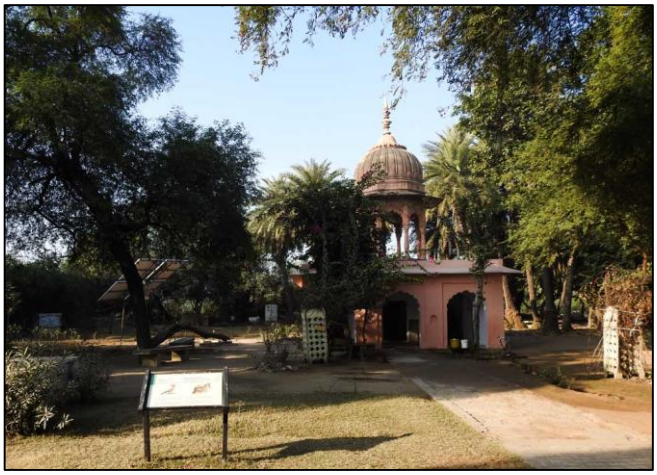
I moved straight ahead and saw some Painted Storks with juveniles on the eastern side which was lined with trees. It seemed to have been their nesting area. The rows of trees slowly became fewer and far between and gave way to marshes which housed a number of cormorants and kingfishers. It was pleasant seeing them diving and catching fish at lightning speed. There were Eurasian Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*) and egrets, as well, resting on the small hillocks interspersed amid the marshes.

I moved straight towards a temple and had a surprise there. A huge flock of ducks shot up into the sky above the tree line, with heads tilted upwards and wings fully spread out like multiple arrows. It was a sight that made me gasp in wonder. The scene changed dramatically within seconds with the birds flapping their wings frantically trying to escape in different directions, finally disappearing out of sight altogether. The story became clear as I found a Greater Spotted Eagle (*Clanga clanga*) gliding towards them, probably out hunting.

Greater Spotted Eagle

The narrow muddy trail leading towards this site was inaccessible to me. My guide drew my attention towards some palm trees in the distance. There was an Indian Scops Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*) with a young one hidden amongst the fronds. I had almost reached the Keoladeo temple which is dedicated to Lord Shiva and from which the name of the park had originated.

Indian Scops Owl



Keoladeo Temple

This was the end of the straight vehicular road and I could see a path on my left towards the east, for further trekking. I climbed up a watchtower in front and observed the surroundings.

White-cheeked Bulbul

There were Red-vented (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and White-cheeked Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus leucotis*) flying around and a few different species of warblers. I spotted a Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) and a few more Bluethroats on my journey along the path.

Eurasian Hoopoe

Lesser Whistling-duck

The surrounding area was a muddy swamp which housed more than a hundred Lesser Whistling-ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*). I did spot a few sandpipers and lapwings in the shallow water, most of them being Wood Sandpipers (*Tringa glareola*).

Red-wattled Lapwing

As I watched a group of Ashy Prinias (*Prinia socialis*), I suddenly caught sight of a Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) in flight. It perched atop a tree but my movement was again restricted by yet another yellow warning sign board. I returned to the temple, walked a little ahead and watched the vast water body in front of me. It had a few Great White Pelicans (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*), but they were very far off and barely visible even through binoculars.

I turned back along the same path and made one final attempt to explore some other areas in the hope of finding some more species. I spotted a Nilgai on the way and admired its sleek body and antlers. I strolled along the path to my left beside the forest bungalow and crossed some residential houses. I could hear the screeching of Indian Grey Hornbills (*Ocyceros birostris*) and the rhythmic calls of Brown-headed Barbets (*Megalaima zeylanica*). I finally found them hidden among the foliage of the huge trees. The row of buildings finally ended and the path curved towards the right.

Black-necked Stork

Here I made another noteworthy sighting of the trip. There were two Black-necked Storks (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) standing still and resting. I waited patiently expecting some action but they remained motionless, like statues. I walked ahead a little and found many Red-crested Pochards (*Netta rufina*), Northern Shovelers (*Spatula clypeata*), Gadwalls (*Mareca strepera*) and Bar-headed Geese in the water.

Gadwall, Red-crested Pochard, Northern Pintail & Eurasian Spoonbill

Northern Shoveler & Common Coot

Common Kingfisher

A Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) was hunting above the water surface and so was a Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*). Unfortunately I could not move any further because another warning sign blocked my way. A local guide present there told me that there were Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*) present in that area but I had to reluctantly return without seeing them.

I walked back to the rickshaw. My journey was almost over but there was a little bit of excitement waiting for me towards the end. A group with huge cameras was trying to focus on something a few metres ahead. I stepped down and was delighted to find a Black Bittern surrounded by layers of thick reeds on all sides .It was there for quite a long time giving me ample time to view it closely. The photographers kept on trying really hard to click a picture but the bird was not ready to come out.

It was late afternoon and time for me to leave. I did feel a little disappointed at not being able to move around freely in the park due to the leopard menace but overall it was still a great trip to remember for a long time.

Crested Serpent Eagle

The full list of sightings during the trip is given below.

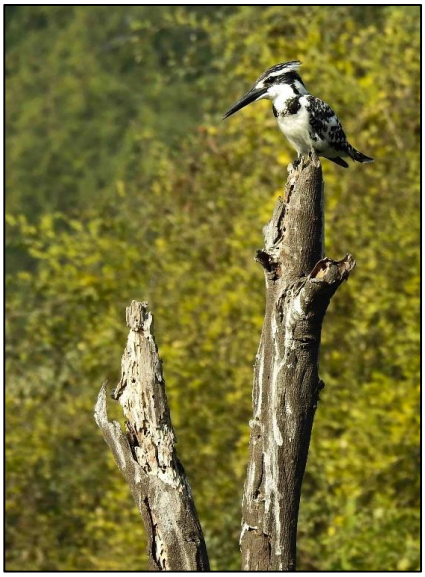
Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*	21	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
2	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*	22	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
3	Eurasian Griffon	*Gyps fulvus*	23	Common Teal	*Anas crecca*
4	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*	24	Northern Shoveler	*Anas clypeata*
5	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	25	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*
6	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	26	Ferruginous Duck	*Aythya nyroca*
7	Red-breasted Flycatcher	*Ficedula parva*	27	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*
8	Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	*Culicicapa ceylonensis*	28	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*
9	Bluethroat	*Luscinia svecica*	29	Common Pochard	*Aythya ferina*
10	Black Redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*	30	Red-crested Pochard	*Netta rufina*
11	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*	31	Eurasian Spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*
12	Brown Fish Owl	*Ketupa zeylonensis*	32	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*
13	Purple Swamphen	*Porphyrio porphyrio*	33	Knob-billed Duck	*Sarkidiornis melanotos*
14	Little Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax niger*	34	Sarus Crane	*Grus antigone*
15	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	35	Great Egret	*Casmerodius albus*
16	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	36	Black-necked Stork	*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*
17	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	37	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*
18	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	38	Great White Pelican	*Pelecanus onocrotalus*
19	Pied Kingfisher	*Ceryle rudis*	39	Lesser Whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca*
20	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*	40	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
41	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*	55	Bar-headed Goose	*Anser indicus*
42	Crested Serpent Eagle	*Spilornis cheela*	56	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*
43	Booted Eagle	*Hieraaetus pennatus*	57	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*
44	Greater Spotted Eagle	*Aquila clanga*	58	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*
45	Black Bittern	*Dupetor flavicollis*	59	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*
46	Indian Scops Owl	*Otus bakkamoena*	60	Black-crowned Night Heron	*Nycticorax nycticorax*
47	Collared Scops Owl	*Otus bakkamoena lettia*	61	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
48	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*	62	White-cheeked Bulbul	*Pycnonotus leucotis*
49	Dusky Eagle Owl	*Bubo coromandus*	63	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
50	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	64	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*
51	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	65	Laughing Dove	*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*
52	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*	66	Common Woodshrike	*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*
53	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	67	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
54	Brown-headed Barbet	*Megalaima zeylanica*	68	Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*

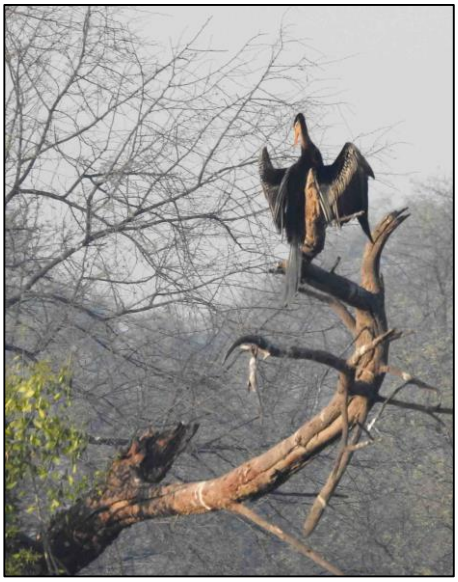
Some other photos taken during the trip:

Long-tailed Shrike

Painted Stork juvenile



Pied Kingfisher



Oriental Darter

Glossy Ibis

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*)

Sociable Lapwing breeding (L) and non-breeding (R) (Nalsarovar, Gujarat, February 05, 2020)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Charadriidae
Genus: *Vanellus*
Species: *V. gregarius*
Size: 27-30 cm

Description & distribution: The Sociable Lapwing, also known as the Sociable Plover, is a critically endangered wader from the lapwing family. It breeds in Russia and Kazakhstan, and winter in parts of Central Asia, northern Africa and northern and western India; it is also occasionally seen in parts of the Middle East (Oman, UAE, Saudi Arabia), Pakistan and Sri Lanka. They are known to show wintering site fidelity.

It has relatively long, black legs and a short black bill. In breeding plumage, it shows a striking pattern on the head, with a black crown, thin blackish-brown lores and irises, pronounced white supercilia joining at the forehead and nape, olive brown upperparts, grey throat and breast, black belly and white undertail. The breeding male has a yellowish wash on the sides of the face, and a maroon-red belly patch. It is unmistakable in flight, with its long black legs, white undertail with a black terminal band, and white secondaries contrasting with black primaries and sandy-brown upperwing coverts. Non-breeding and juvenile birds show a less distinct head pattern, white belly and browner back and breast, the latter also showing streaks. Additionally, the juvenile has a scalloped back with prominent buff fringes and dark subterminal crescents to its scapulars and coverts.

Habitat & behaviour: The Sociable Lapwing is usually seen in small to medium flocks, in scrub country, dry wastelands, temperate deserts, steppe, and in ploughed, stubble and dry fallow fields, as well as cultivated fields, rural gardens, grassland or other arable land. It forages by walking or running in short bursts, stopping abruptly and probing for prey with its body tilted forward. It also vibrates its foot rapidly on the surface, to flush out invertebrates. Its diet consists primarily of insects, caterpillars, beetles, grasshoppers, cicadas, spiders, scorpions, and crickets. It may also feed on grains, seeds, leaves and flowers. Its flight is slower than the flight shown by other Lapwings, with steady but slow wing-beats. Its call is a rapid chattering sound or a harsh *kretsch* or *kereck*..

Nesting: The Sociable Lapwing breeds generally between April and July in their breeding range. They are monogamous and breed in small colonies. The nest is a shallow scrape on the ground, usually near water on saline plains or on short vegetation, and may be bare or lined with twigs, grass and pebbles. The usual clutch consists of 3-4 pale buff oval eggs with dark olive-brown mottling. Incubation duties are shared by the parents.

Local name: The Sociable Lapwing is known as *'Sangachari tithari'* in Hindi, *'Maltavdi titodi'* in Gujarati and *'Hot-ti-ti'* in Bengali.

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